

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010

Remarks on the American Opportunity Tax Credit

October 13, 2010

Rescue Efforts at the San Jose Mine in Copiapo, Chile

Good afternoon, everybody. Before we get to what we're here to talk about, which is education, I just want to say a quick word about what so far appears to be a successful rescue of the trapped Chilean miners.

This is obviously something that's captivated the world's attention, and this rescue is a tribute not only to the determination of the rescue workers and the Chilean Government, but also the unity and resolve of the Chilean people, who have inspired the world. And I want to express the hopes of the American people that the miners who are still trapped underground will be returned home safely as soon as possible.

Let me also commend so many people of goodwill—not only in Chile, but also from the United States and around the world—who are lending a hand in this rescue effort, from the NASA team that helped design the escape vehicle, to American companies that manufactured and delivered parts of the rescue drill, to the American engineer who flew in from Afghanistan to operate the drill.

Last night, the whole world watched the scene at "Camp Esperanza" as the first miner was lifted out from under more than 2,000 feet of rock and then embraced by his young son and family. And the tears they shed, after so much time apart, expressed not only their own relief, not only their own joy, but the joy of people everywhere. So it was a thrilling moment, and we're hopeful that those celebrations duplicate themselves throughout the rest of today.

Education/American Opportunity Tax Credit

Behind me I've got the Mohan family: Edward, Kathleen, and Sarah. Raise your hands—there we go. [*Laughter*] I've got the O'Mealia family: Mary Ellen with her sons, Sean and Tom, and her daughters, Kelly and Leigh Anne. And we've got the Maynard family: Philip and Joanne with son, Gregory, and daughters, Katherine and Elizabeth.

We just had a wonderful visit. And the reason we're here today, all of us, is that one of the most important things that's going to determine our long-term success is education. Over the past 21 months, as we've climbed our way out of this recession, I've often said that if we want Americans—and America itself—to succeed in the 21st century, we need to offer all of our young people the best education the world has to offer.

At a time when the unemployment rate for folks who've never gone to college is almost double what it is for those who have gone to college, when most of the new jobs being created will require some higher education, when countries that out-educate us today will out-compete us tomorrow, offering our children a world-class education isn't just a moral obligation, it's an economic imperative.

And that's why, from the start of my administration, we've been doing everything we can to make that kind of education possible, from the cradle to the classroom, from college through a career. We're reforming Head Start and challenging weak programs to compete for funds, because if you're receiving tax dollars, you should be delivering results for our kids. We're

launching a Race to the Top in our States, which is raising standards and promoting excellence in teaching, so our students, all of them, can graduate ready for college and a career.

We're upgrading our undervalued community colleges so we can link students looking for work with businesses that are looking to hire. We're eliminating tens of billions of dollars in wasteful subsidies for banks to profit as middlemen administering student loans, and we're using that money to make college more affordable for millions of additional students.

And we're offering middle class families what's called an American Opportunity Tax Credit, a college tuition tax credit worth up to \$2,500 a year. I am calling on Congress to make this tax credit permanent so it's worth up to \$10,000 for 4 years of college, because we've got to make sure that in good times or bad, our families can invest in their children's future and in the future of our country.

Today the Treasury Department is putting out a report showing what a difference these college tuition tax credits are making. Over our first year in office, we've increased tax cuts for higher education by over 90 percent. We're helping the dream of a college degree—putting that dream within reach of more than 12 million students from working families.

And so, I'm pleased that the families standing behind me could join me here today. Mary Ellen O'Mealia is a single mom who's been working hard to put each of her four kids, Sean, Kelly, Leigh Anne, and Tom, through college. And it hasn't been easy, but it's been a little easier thanks to what we've done. Like Mary Ellen, Joanne and Philip Maynard are able to put their son, Gregory, and their daughters, Katherine and Elizabeth, through UMass Amherst, in part, because of this American Opportunity Tax Credit. And this tax credit is making possible Kathleen and Edward Mohan to give their daughter Sarah the education she needs to pursue her dream of becoming a nurse.

So all these families have benefited directly from this tax credit, and they represent families all across the country from every State. What we need to do is to make it possible for all America's working families to do what the O'Mealias, the Maynards, and the Mohans have been able to do, and that's to send their kids to college.

Now, if the Republicans in Congress had their way that would be more difficult. They've proposed cutting back on education by 20 percent. That means reducing financial aid for 8 million students and leaving our community colleges without the resources they need to prepare our students for the jobs of the future.

Nothing would be more shortsighted. There's an educational arms race taking place around the world right now, from China to Germany, to India to South Korea. Cutting back on education would amount to unilateral disarmament. We can't afford to do that. The nation that educates its children the best will be the nation that leads the global economy in the 21st century.

Now, ultimately, this is not just about making our economy more competitive. It's not just about preparing our kids for the jobs of the future, though all those things are absolutely essential. It's also about who we are as a people. It's about building a brighter future—where every child in this country has a chance to rise above any barriers of race or faith or station and they can fulfill their God-given potential, where the American Dream is a living reality—by opening the doors of college to anyone who wants to go. That's a future we can help build together.

These three families represent those core values, represent those beliefs. The parents who are standing here have worked extraordinarily hard to make sure that their children have opportunities. And we need to reward that sense of responsibility, that sense of commitment to the next generation, by making sure they're not having to do it alone.

So thank you all for being here. Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:50 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : American Opportunity Tax Credit :: Remarks on beneficiaries.

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Names: Maynard, Elizabeth; Maynard, Gregory; Maynard, Joanne; Maynard, Katherine; Maynard, Philip; Mohan, Edward; Mohan, Kathleen; Mohan, Sarah; O'Mealia, Kelly; O'Mealia, Leigh Anne; O'Mealia, Mary Ellen; O'Mealia, Sean; O'Mealia, Tom.

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